

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Irene Hidalgo, 67, retired Dole Company (Hawaiian Pine Company) field forelady

Irene (Okuda) Hidalgo, Japanese, was born in Lahaina, Maui on December 25, 1911. The daughter of sugar plantation laborers, she came to Oahu in 1927 and worked as a maid in various private homes around the island. In 1929, she married Kinichi Suetani and together they worked in private homes--she as a maid and he as a cook.

In 1935, Irene and her husband moved to Pearl City and began farming watercress. Because the war forced them to give up their farm, they began working for Hawaiian Pine Company and moved into Kipapa-5 Camp in 1942.

She became a regular worker and a field forelady soon after beginning work in the fields. In 1953, she suffered a whiplash injury which kept her in and out of hospitals for months. Her husband died in 1962, but she continued to work in the fields until 1974.

Presently living in Wahiawa with Augustine Hidalgo, whom she married in 1974, she enjoys working with her plants. She is a member of the Wahiawa Rainbow Club.

Tape No. 6-7-1-79
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

With

Irene Hidalgo (IH)

February 28, 1979

Wahiawa, Oahu

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Mrs. Irene Hidalgo. Today is February 28, 1979 and we're at her home in Wahiawa.

You were born in Lahaina [Maui], right?

IH: Right. I was born in 1911.

WN: Do you remember when you came to Honolulu?

IH: Nineteen twenty-seven.

WN: Your parents came along with you?

IH: No, only my mother and my sisters.

WN: Where was your father?

IH: He was back in the plantation [in Lahaina]. And then my mother left and then I found a job as a housework [in Honolulu] so I didn't want to go back [to Maui].

WN: I see. This was---you found a job in 1927 as a maid at [Wahiawa]. How long were you a maid at Wahiawa?

IH: Only for a few months. After that we went Kailua.

WN: Kailua and did you live there and clean house?

IH: Yeah, uh huh, and my husband cooked [in a private home].

WN: Then in 1934 you said you moved to Pearl City?

IH: Yes.

WN: Can you tell us why you moved from Kailua to [Pearl City]?

IH: Because we were going back and forth. When this person [moves] out, they leave us then we out of job so we come back to Pearl City.

WN: What did you do in Pearl City?

IH: Well, my husband go look for part-time [work] and then I look for part-time. We were [growing] watercress and then we rent one place and then we was working watercress and raise some vegetables.

WN: What made you decide to go into watercress?

IH: Well, my husband's brother was a watercress farmer, so he said mo' betta you folks settle down, so we said okay. But while we were raising watercress, we tried to make a farm out of it. Then that millionaire, the Coconut Island millionaire, what his name was? He asked my husband to come and be a chief cook over there. So [my husband] went go look at the Coconut Island, Kaneohe. [But] my brother-in-law said, "Since you settle down over here [Pearl City], why you like move again. Settle down already." So we did.

WN: So you decided to settle down and farm watercress. Did you folks own the land there?

IH: No, no, Bishop Estate.

WN: Did you do any of the farming [chores] yourself?

IH: [Yes]. Plant, you know, this and that. Yeah, [but] 1942, we had to come pineapple, eh, because we cannot rent one house over there [Pearl City]. No more house, eh? So we have to give up the farm but we rent it to one family. But Bishop Estate didn't like the idea what he [husband] was doing [i.e. sub-leasing]. They want to take away the farm from us.

WN: Why did you have to move out?

IH: Because we don't have house. Alien cannot live over there. You know, [we were] right by the waterfront, that's why. (Since my husband was an alien, we had to move away from the waterfront. That was the time of martial law). So we have to look for outside house and then we decided to go pineapple that's how we went to pineapple.

WN: Because they [the pineapple company] provided housing for you?

IH: Yeah.

- WN: Was that the main reason why you decided to go pineapple?
- IH: Uh huh [yes]. Because we cannot stay over there [and] so we have to rent the watercress place, too.
- WN: So you were farming and living in Pearl City from 1934 until 1942?
- IH: Right.
- WN: Okay. So when you decided to come to Wahiawa for pineapple, how did you first hear about the job opportunity or the housing opportunity in Wahiawa?
- IH: My husband had a relative in Libby plantation so [he said] "Since you folks don't have any house to go, why don't you folks go pineapple. Try pineapple because they're hiring." [But] we didn't like Libby, so we went Dole.
- WN: Why didn't you like Libby?
- IH: Relative [working] together, no good, eh. Far away, better, yeah?
- WN: Did you consider other companies?
- IH: No, no, that's why we went Dole and then they wen hire us.
- WN: What things did you hear about Dole?
- IH: Nothing, because you don't know when you desperate of house and Dole has plenty house, that time, so we moved over to Kipapa-5 Camp.
- WN: So how was the house over there? Was it better than the one you had in Pearl City?
- IH: Well, Pearl City one, we built our home. [But] you have to live where you can find a house so we stayed [at Kipapa-5]. It wasn't bad because you got everything, two bedroom home.
- WN: Did you have to fill out any kind of application [when you applied for pineapple work]?
- IH: That time [during the war] they were so desperate of workers. They just give it to us.
- WN: Did you start as a full-time worker right away?
- IH: Yeah. Ever since 1942 until I retired.
- WN: Do you remember taking any type of test, physical exam when you first worked?

IH: Oh, yes, you have to take physical.

WN: Do you know of anyone who didn't pass for some reason?

IH: I don't know. Like, you know, farm you stay all by yourself, eh. You have to work all by yourself and do this and that. You don't have time to talk to nobody so we don't know.

WN: I see. What was your first job that you had in the field?

IH: We went picking [pineapples], I think. Today, maybe you go picking. Some days they tell you have to go weeding. [Another day] take off slips. But that time I was healthy, so you don't mind. Any kind job, I didn't mind. I like that farm work, you know. The housework, I don't care very much. I rather work in the field.

WN: Could you describe what picking was like?

IH: It's easy for me because I love rough job. Gotta get [canvas] bag, gotta get knife and then when the truck stops you go down and then you take certain sections [of the field], you know. Well, you hold your bag and you have to pick the pineapple while you're going in the line [i.e. between the rows of pine]. Coming out [after picking the row] you have to load it in the bag and then put it outside on the first row [along the roadside]. Then if you get plenty over there, you have to cut the bottom and the top [crown] off and stack 'em in the box. [See photo section.]

WN: You had to do that [cut the bottom and the top]? There wasn't anybody else who cut the pines?

IH: Well, sometime they do but most of the time, you do your own because they had contract. You do your own, [but] if [there is plenty] work, we have some [people] picking and some cut the tops and some crating [in] the boxes.

WN: This is all one gang? Do you remember how many were in one gang?

IH: Gee, that's how many years, yeah. I really don't know.

WN: Did you have to stay in a certain area or could you go anywhere to pick?

IH: They assign you. One gang gotta stay on one cut and then all [the gangs are] divided into different place. Sometimes you just go picking and then you just take it outside on the road. Then [get] the one who going cut the tops and crate it in the box. So we all have to stay together.

[But] it's wartime and school children was coming out and then I became forelady.

WN: So you were a forelady almost immediately after you started work?

IH: Yeah, because wartime I went in.

WN: How did you become forelady?

IH: Well, maybe not enough foreladies because the truckloads of school-children come in.

WN: Was it because you were a good worker or something like that?

IH: I don't know. They just put me so---I didn't like it. I rather work alone.

WN: Did you work or did you just supervise?

IH: You know the children, they say, "Lady, that pineapple pokes me." Things like that. So you have to do whatever you can. You gotta teach them how to go in the line.

WN: When you first started working, was there any kind of instructions that they gave you that you had to do? Any set of rules?

IH: But they teach you because you don't know.

WN: How do you know which pineapples to pick?

IH: Well, they tell you, quarter ripe, half ripe, pick this kind, and that kind, you know.

WN: Did they teach you how to judge it by looks?

IH: Uh huh. [Yes.]

WN: Did it take you a long time to learn?

IH: No, because I love that rough job, eh. It wasn't that bad.

WN: Did they scold you or tell you when you made a mistake?

IH: I don't know. Was strict but not that strict. You make mistake, not that, like, you know, office or someplace else. See when you make mistake, it's big mistake, huh, but pineapple, not that kind mistake.

WN: Did you have to grade the pines yourself, according to size?

IH: Yeah. You have to lay down [lengthwise in the box] the huge one [grade one]. About 10 go in, I think, or eight, yeah.

WN: So you just look at it and you can tell...

IH: Yeah, you can tell. This pineapple is huge [grade one], second size [grade two], third size [grade three] because the second size [and third size], you gotta stand up the pineapple [in the box].

- WN: Why do you have to stand it up?
- IH: For make the pineapple be level. Then the first one [layer] you stand up like this and the next one you lie down to make the layers even.
- WN: And who picked the box up?
- IH: The truck brings the empty box for you and picks up the full boxes.
- WN: Were the lunas watching you all the time?
- IH: Yeah, they watch you because---like I was honest when I work in the pineapple field. I loved the job, that's why, I used to do whatever I can.
- WN: When you got paid by contract [i.e. piecework], did you feel you had to work faster?
- IH: Yeah, you have to work faster. I make more money than my husband because my husband was old. I get more money than him because I go contract and he [was] sitting on the truck and he deliver boxes, pick up boxes. So payday, I get more money than him.
- WN: His job wasn't contract?
- IH: Uh uh. [No]. So he said, "Mo' betta I go cut top [i.e. crowns] for you, you go pick." He don't want to lose, too. He want to make money, too. (Laughs).
- WN: What other jobs did you do besides picking pine?
- IH: Weeding.
- WN: Weeding. Could you describe that?
- IH: Well, just, just sharp your hoe and then you start weeding. [Start from the beginning] of the line, and then you start weeding. Was plenty grass that time. Kipapa-5 fields is rainy all the time, so we go weeding. Well, you have to go stripping too, take the slips off.
- WN: When you were weeding, how did you get paid?
- IH: Sometime contract but you cannot make [money with] contract.
- WN: If was contract, how would they pay you?
- IH: They say one line is so much. But cannot. I work hard because too much grass.

WN: How about stripping?

IH: Stripping, too. You go contract too. Like I said in 1953 I had accident and ever since that, my hand start getting numb and my legs get weaker.

WN: This is your whiplash accident?

IH: Yeah, but the doctor tells me I got arthritis so I was having arthritis treatment all the time. But [the foreman] told me, "You Japanese---every nationality can go [slip] checker, you Japanese, why you no can go checker?" I love to go checker but I cannot hold pencil.

WN: Can you tell us exactly what it was---what [slip] checking was?

IH: Checking was counting how many slips [they pick]. How many slips they have in that place and then you check it up. You write it [the number] down. You gotta look for the size [of the slip], too, you know. Certain amount size they [the company] like and [if the strippers] take a smaller one, you have to tell them. The foreman tells them too but as a checker you have [to tell them that they're picking the wrong size slip].

WN: What do they do with the ones that are too small, or too big?

IH: Just throw it away. You cannot plant it.

WN: Do you remember how much you got---how much they got paid?

IH: I forgot. Then I went planting checker.

WN: Planting checker, also?

IH: That was good, because [in] the beginning when I go [to the planting field] I don't know the men, and I get about 10 to 12 men or 15 sometimes. I mark the man. [If] they get white shirt, I mark "white shirt", because I don't know their name and I don't know their face. [So] I [write] the number of that place [they are planting next to "white shirt"]. By lunch time, they all dirty, eh. You cannot tell them by their clothes no more. Oh, I used to get hardest time.

WN: Did they have any number or anything?

IH: They have numbers but you don't know. You have to know this man.

WN: So after they plant, they tell you how much they planted?

IH: No, you go and check up how many lines [they planted]. One line get so many planting. If they plant 10 lines, [you know how] many plants [they planted]. About 1:30 [p.m.], you go around indivi-

dually and you tell them, "How many you want to make a day? How many more you can plant until 3:30 [p.m.]?"

They say they want to make so much money. You go figure out for them how much [they would make if they finished a certain section].

WN: So you tell them how much they should be planting?

IH: If they ask, but if they don't ask....But if straight place, you don't need to figure because 10 lines is so many [plants]. One line get so many [plants] but get short kind [lines], long kind [lines]. That's the one you have to figure out for them.

WN: How did you get the checking job?

IH: They told me go checker.

WN: Did you have to be good in math?

IH: No. You know, most of the ladies they good checkers. Some, I taught [some ladies in] two weeks. But when I went [for the first time], nobody teach me how. Nobody told me how to do. I cried, I cried. The foreman supposed to teach me but he didn't teach me. Oh, I had hard time. They never train me and then I went surveyor.

WN: Surveyor? Can you describe that?

IH: When you go surveyor, you gotta walk in that soft dirt because that's where they plow. Then the foreman tell you hold the tape so many feet long and then they measure [with] the stick. They put the sticks [in the ground] and they go ahead. You make the cuts [sections] in the pineapple field. I did almost everything inside there.

When I had that back surgery and the boss tell me, "Since the back bothers you, you want to be timekeeper?" I worked over there about two months. I quit. My back couldn't take it. You know when you sit down and you shuffle the time cards....

I said, "No, I didn't want timekeeping job."

When you sick and you come back, if the doctor says that you cannot do regular job [in the fields], they give you janitor job to clean the office, clean the tables, windows, floors, like that. That's why good, the company.

WN: Were you the only woman who was doing these surveying jobs, checking jobs?

IH: No, had plenty ladies. They tell 'em come in and they check. Some, they didn't like.

WN: Would you have rather worked just as a regular planter or a picker instead of checking?

IH: Yeah, but after the surgery, I couldn't do so much because they [made a] different rotation. They didn't hire any planting checkers because the foreman could do all. Surveyor department do all, you know, one block, one section get so many plants. They measure all. Surveyor people do all that and they give to the foreman. The foreman take charge of all the planting men and they know how much in that section.

WN: So after you finished surveying and checking, you went back into the fields?

IH: Uh huh. Do this and that---all kind of job. Well, sometimes I used to go as a maid. You know the boss's [i.e., supervisor's] house.

(Interruption by other people. Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: You worked as a maid during off season?

IH: Yes, off season. I used to go this boss house today, next day go that boss house, go next that boss house, you know.

WN: Did you know beforehand that you were going to go to somebody's house [to work as a maid]?

IH: Yeah, they tell you. They tell you that you go to this house. But gradually, you know, the company start charging them [the bosses] more for paperwork [for hiring field workers as maids]. [So] they [the bosses] start [hiring] outsiders. When I go [to be a maid], I get company time. You know, they [the bosses] pay through the company. [But] I think they start charging them for more for paperwork and all those things, so I went back to the fields.

WN: How was the pay as a maid?

IH: Same, same like in grade one, or grade [two]. But good, you know, you work as a maid because you know most of the bosses.

WN: You would work all day there as a maid?

IH: Yeah, all day.

WN: How did you get the job as a maid?

IH: They [ask] me if I can go.

WN: Did the fact that you had experience as a maid before have anything to do with you getting the [job]?

IH: I don't know. They told me to go because I think sometimes I go babysitter nighttime. [But] that's different pay.

WN: Who did you babysit for?

IH: The bosses' children.

WN: Did you get paid any overtime?

IH: No, no, no, not that plantation time, now. You get lower pay for babysitting.

WN: Oh, they paid you separate?

IH: Yeah. Because my husband was old too and he retired after war.

WN: He retired in 1948, around, yeah?

IH: Yeah, about that.

WN: Did you work in that candy factory? [Dole cannery manufactured candy during the war.]

IH: Candy factory, yeah.

WN: When the war broke out, did they offer you other jobs? Did you hear about other jobs, say, in Pearl Harbor or Hickam?

IH: No, no, because we stay pineapple already.

WN: You wanted to stay in pineapple?

IH: I like rough job.

WN: So what did you do in the candy factory?

IH: Well, we make candies, coat them. We pack cigarette, match, candy and seal it up and [together].

WN: Was this for the soldiers?

IH: For the soldiers, yeah.

WN: What did you do in the cannery?

IH: Ginaca side and then trimming sometimes. Packing, I didn't like.

WN: Why didn't you like packing?

IH: I don't like packing. I like Ginaca. Ginaca is better.

WN: Why did you like Ginaca?

IH: Oh, no more pressure. Packing, [there is] pressure. You have to know the grade of the pineapple, you know, number 1 and number 2. You make mistake and you put number 2 pineapple in number 1 container, it's wrong. I didn't like. I rather stay Ginaca side.

WN: So what did you do in the Ginaca side?

IH: Well, operate the machine and then [when] the jam come out, you clean the rubbish [i.e., clean the bits of skin and eyes from the jam].

WN: What did you like better, the cannery or working in the fields?

IH: The fields, better. Well, I'm more like the rough [work].

WN: Can you tell me why you always mention that you like to do the rough work? Can you tell me why you like it or what's good about it?

IH: No, I just like that. Like cleaning house, I rather go out in the field, out in the yard and touch the plants. When I was small [in Maui], we have to work in the canefield. Saturdays, Sundays, holidays, that's why I work in the sugar cane. We cut the cane and we plant, we irrigate. We did all when we were small. You know, like us [children] we used to wear pants to go in the canefield to work. They said, "From tomorrow, all ladies wear skirt with the long stocking. So from tomorrow, you wear skirt, and I give you 75 cents one day."

That's what the ladies' wages was. That one I cannot forget [because] you work early in the morning and you have to work until 5 o'clock [p.m.] in the afternoon. But as children, you [want to] get off 1:30 [p.m.] or 2 o'clock and money don't matter to us that time because we were only just kids. So I say, "No, I no like 75 cents." Each time you go work, first [as a child] was about 30 cents one day. As you grow older, the wages come up.

I said, "I don't want 75 cents. I want to come home about 1:30. But you have to work until 5 o'clock if you [want to] get 75 cents a day. No, I no like so I think I was raised that way. That's why I like to work out in the field.

WN: So your sugar experience and then your watercress experience and then pineapple experiences were all mostly outdoor work?

IH: (Laughs) Yeah, mostly outdoor.

WN: You were talking about your clothing. What did you wear when you were working out in the pineapple fields?

IH: Pine fields, you have to wear long shirt and you have to put cover over because the pineapple pokes, you know.

WN: What kind of cover?

IH: Oh, with that, what they call that in English, ahina cloth? You know the one they make pants, jeans like...

WN: Oh, denim.

IH: Yeah, that one you sew over the sleeves until from here till here.

WN: From the wrist to about the shoulder?

IH: Uh huh, and then you have to have cover apron because the thing pokes you all over. And you cover your face so you no like get black, eh [from the sun]. (Laughs)

WN: What did you cover your face with?

IH: Handkerchief.

WN: What about shoes?

IH: Before we used to wear men's shoes and then everybody start wearing rubber boots. Rubber boots is good because even if rain....

WN: You know when you started wearing rubber boots? Was it after the war?

IH: Yeah, after.

WN: Did they [the company] supply you with all those clothes?

IH: No, no, no, no, you have to supply your own. Everything, you have to buy. Gloves too, but the company get apron and gloves which they sell cheaper [to] the workers.

WN: What about your goggles?

IH: Goggles, oh, goggles is free.

WN: Didn't you feel hot out there?

IH: When you stay in there, you don't feel it. You don't feel nothing because maybe you getting paid, that's why. If now they tell me to go out in the pineapple field, I don't think I can make it because hot [and] sometime, rain. But when you was working, you don't feel that way. Once you go in, you don't feel anything.

WN: When it rains, what did you folks do? Did you still work?

IH: Yeah, you have to. [But] if too much, they tell you go home.

WN: Did you wear any raincoat?

IH: Yeah, we [had to carry] lunch can, raincoat, water, all in that big bag you have to carry.

WN: This is a separate bag from the one that you put the pines inside?

IH: Yes, different but you have to have your own. You have to carry your lunch can, raincoat, water. You have to carry your own water. [But] summertime [when] the schoolchildren come up they give them water can, goggles. They lend them the water cans and they tell them to buy the apron.

WN: How about your knife?

IH: Oh, the company, all company.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: What about rest breaks? Did you get any rest breaks?

IH: If you tired, go drink water. I don't think we had rest breaks, though.

WN: You mean you could just tell the luna that you want to go drink water?

IH: Uh huh or you want to go use the restroom.

WN: Where did you go use the restroom?

IH: In the field.

WN: You just find some covering?

IH: Uh huh. But [while working in the] planting field, they build one shelter for you.

WN: Is this just for the women to use?

IH: Yeah. You know, like us, we go checker, and get some girls planting too, that's why. They put that [shelter] up for them.

WN: What about when you had your period?

IH: Well, doesn't bother [us]. They had the cover place [shelter].

WN: That's the planting field?

IH: Yeah, planting field but outside [i.e. fields beyond the planting stage], no. In the field they don't have that.

WN: So where did you go?

- IH: Where you can find big [tall] pineapple [plants].
- WN: Was there shade around?
- IH: Well, if you [working] in the center of the pineapple field, you don't have any shade.
- WN: What about when you went to eat lunch?
- IH: Well, when the foreman blow the whistle, we go out on the road and eat our lunch.
- WN: Sometimes out in the sun?
- IH: Yeah, we have to go out on the road where our lunch bag is. Especially [if] you contract [i.e. no time to waste when working piecework]. You sit down right there, you eat. You sit down over there and everybody share each other.
- WN: What did you bring usually for lunch?
- IH: Rice, eh? (Laughs) Well, anything.
- WN: How did you wash your hands out in the field?
- IH: You cannot wash your hands. No place to go and wash your hands so you wear gloves. You cannot take off your gloves-- only eating time, you take off. When you working, you always have to have gloves.
- WN: What if someone got hurt in the field? What would happen?
- IH: The foreman always carry first aid kit and maybe with that they stop 'em until [job] foreman come around. I think that's what they do.
- WN: But if someone had something serious like heart attack?
- IH: I never....Well, one time [when] we were loading slips and I was the forelady, I had to take care two trucks and in the morning they were going together, you know, one section, one road, two trucks and then one went ahead---one truck stay on the other end. When I was walking they said one lady fainted; it was too hot. Along the side of the truck. It was so hot, so she fainted. But how can I watch, one truck on that end and one this side, everytime going back and forth? Then I told her, "Are you feeling all right, you want to go doctor."
- She said, "No, it's all right."
- I told her to go rest under the shade. So, she did.
- WN: What were some of the other dangerous things about working out in the pineapple field?

IH: You have your goggles on at all times. You cannot wear this kind goggles [regular glasses]. You have to get the one that has cover or the screen.

WN: What were the difficult times in harvesting, in picking pine?

IH: The worse one when you go pick pineapple is the first picking [i.e. first crop], because the pineapple growing like that. All tangling up and you have to break the line [be the first to walk through the row] to go in. That's the most hard time. They say "break up the line" or something like that.

WN: So was hard to pass between the rows?

IH: Yeah, because the leaves is all tangled up at the beginning. Then the weeding people don't go in because when the pineapple grow so big, there is not too many grasses. So you the first [to go in]. When the pineapple ripe, you the first to go in [the rows]. That's the hardest.

WN: You mentioned the boom harvester. Was it easier to work after that came in [1947]?

IH: Yeah, that one easy because you don't have to carry [the pineapple]. Before you have to carry all that out [in the canvas bag] and then you have to crate your own. That's hard but when you're healthy, it doesn't matter, you know. [But] once I got my neck operated, my back operated, (Laughs) I want to quit already but I have to [work in order to get] my Social Security.

WN: Did you get those injuries from working pine?

IH: Yes, I was riding the truck. They had this stick bench for us to sit down on the truck, you know. They have a bench, you see.

WN: About two inches thick?

IH: About two inches, eh, about. When the truck went down the hill, he braked [suddenly], so I hit myself on the corner of the bench. That day, I went to dispensary. Next day, I couldn't work because my neck was all stiff already.

WN: You were going from where to where [on the truck]?

IH: Oh, in the morning when we was going [from Whitmore to] Robinson. We had Robinson Field too, so that's the place I got hurt. I got hurt in 1953 so from 1957 [I was] going doctor. They tell me I get arthritis. My hands were all numb. My legs wobble.

WN: Did you go to the plantation doctor?

IH: No, outside doctor. [He] tells me I get arthritis, land in the hospital. I couldn't stand up. My hands weak so in 1958 I had my first disc operation on my neck and from 1958 on I was no good

already. I cannot write, I cannot comb my hair, I cannot drive. You know, you drive but your hands are numb and when my brother-in-law--he's a farmer, you know, watercress raiser--he told me, "I think you get rotten bones so you go doctor you tell him you no more arthritis, you get rotten bones." (Laughs)

WN: But all that time you didn't get any kind of compensation from the company?

IH: I was fighting for the case, you know. We went to this compensation office.

WN: How about the union?

IH: Later on after I had my back surgery, I went to the union and then we fight for the case and then [the company] gave me some money. Not much but they say if you get cripple or anything from the accident, the company going pay the bill. [But] how I can prove that? So I just let it go, even I get backaches sometimes, I just let it go.

WN: When you were working with men, did you try to compete with the men, by any chance?

IH: Yeah, I beat them up. I was good worker. You know, I don't want to brag but I really worked. You know some ladies, some old-time ladies that I used to work with, they tell me, "Oh, you really can work, yeah." I don't want to lose, I want to win, you know. I want to make more money than the men. When we used to pick pineapple, oh, I used to carry plenty pineapple in the bag. And I'm fast in cutting the tops off but not any more. I'm too slow now. Old age. (Laughs)

WN: Well, how did the men feel about that?

IH: They don't feel nothing. Only one man, I couldn't beat. I was number second. So, the boss, he told me, "You good worker, I give you a break. You go work in the timekeeping office."

That's why he wen put me in the timekeeping office, but my back cannot take. The manager he like I go work their house everytime.

I say, "No, that's it. I'm too old already." Big job you know, when you work in a house. They make you clean windows, everything.

WN: Do you remember what it was like working out in the fields during the wartime? Did you have to carry your gas mask?

IH: No, I don't think so. We have gas mask one time but we hand it in the beginning time. But no, we don't have to.

WN: Was there any discrimination because you were Japanese during the war?

IH: No, no, nothing because when we was working in the candy factory and there was a girl and she called me "Jap."

So I said, "I'm not a Jap, I was born and raised here. I'm Hawaiian."

So from that, she don't bother me. (Laughs) You know, that kind only one is like that but....Pineapple field is the best since I work long [time]. They even gave me one Bulova watch. But you know for how many years, [I was the] only lady to work [during the] off season time. Mrs. Watanabe was but she left. I don't know what year she left the company.

WN: You mean, you didn't see any other ladies working out there?

IH: Uh uh, only myself and the mans. [Because her husband was retired, IH was one of the few women to be retained as a regular employee following the war. Most women whose husbands were still able-bodied and working were dropped to non-regular or seasonal status.]

WN: When you came home at the end of the day, did you talk to your husband about work at all?

IH: No. Too tired, eh, when you come home.

WN: So what do you do when you come home?

IH: Before the surgery, I used to go as a maid, as a babysitter. I used to go as a cook. I used to go as waitress. I used to do all that outside part-time job.

WN: All this [after] you were out in the fields?

IH: Yeah, when I come back, they tell me, "You can babysit?"

I say, "Okay."

WN: What about the children you were raising while you worked?

IH: They all grown up.

WN: What about cooking? Did you have time to cook at home?

IH: Yeah. Just plain kind, eh, no more fancy. (Laughs)

WN: And the cooking and the cleaning and the laundry, you did all that?

IH: Yeah, you have to. Every Saturday or Sundays.

WN: Did you have to babysit on Saturdays?

IH: Yeah, sometimes.

WN: How did your husband feel about you working?

IH: Cannot help because he retired and the wages were so small for his retirement because he work only little bit. Three children was going school and all that....

WM: What about the financial money matters? Who handled the money matters in the family?

IH: I do. But it's small. Pineapple field money and my husband's small too. Then when he retired, he went back to Pearl City, back to his farm. I couldn't drive that time so my boy and myself was up Whitmore. I sent the oldest one to Pearl City since he graduate high school, eh. We couldn't send them to college or anything like that. Then in the meantime, I learn how to drive and since I got the license, then we went back to Pearl City and then when I got surgery after surgery like that, I have to stay with my mother near Wahiawa because I cannot commute too long drive.

WN: How was living conditions in the camps? You lived in Kipapa-5 first and then you moved to Kipapa-1?

IH: Doesn't matter as long as you get good neighbors, you know. It doesn't matter at all.

WN: How did you feel about moving from camp to camp?

IH: Well, [there was] no choice. They was going move the K-5 houses to Whitmore so we went down K-1 to wait for the house [at Whitmore] to be finished.

WN: This is in 1948?

IH: Yes, and then we went move over there [Whitmore] but well, what can you do. You don't know how to drive. That's why I start learning how to drive when I was old.

WN: When you moved from Kipapa-5 to Whitmore, did you also switch fields, too? Did you work in a field close to Whitmore?

IH: No, you have to go all over now. Before, when you living K-5, more likely [you work] only K-5 or K-1. [But] when you [live] Whitmore, you have to go Kawaihoa side, Robinson, Mililani. All over, you gotta go. You know, when you go [to the dispatch] in the morning [in Whitmore], they assign you to work here and there but [when] you stay K-5, you hardly go outside [only] when they need you, then you go.

WN: Were there any activities in the camps?

IH: They do but [I didn't have] time [to participate]. You work hard in the pineapple field, you come home. Hard, eh, sometime.

WN: Anything that the company sponsored?

IH: I don't know because I don't join them. Company used to give picnics, like that. Like now both of us retired. Since we don't have anything to do, we go down my boy's place go clean the yard and we come back. Yeah. Even now, even the neighbor's children I don't know. The ladies, too, I don't know.

WN: So even when you were working you didn't know that many people because you worked...

IH: I work and then I don't want to mingle around with too many. If they don't want to talk to me, I don't want to bother, you know.

WN: One more question, would you encourage younger people to do the same kind of work that you did?

IH: If they want to. If I grow young again, I do the same thing because I like pineapple field. It's open and [at] that time [it] wasn't so strict.

WN: So if someone wanted to work [in the pineapple fields], you would recommend it?

IH: Yeah, I would try and tell them. But I tell my grandchildren, "If you no go college, you going be just like Granny work in the pineapple fields." (Laughs) You like work in the pineapple fields, no go school, go work pineapple fields. Since Granny never get education, she worked pineapple field. Pineapple field good, you know. So if you don't want to go college, you go pineapple field." (Laughs)

They say, "No, no, I don't want pineapple field." (Laughs)

END OF INTERVIEW

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Volume I

ETHNIC STUDIES ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

**Ethnic Studies Program
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